

Opening Statement
The Honorable Doug Lamborn (R-CO)
Chairman
House Water, Power and Oceans Subcommittee
Oversight Hearing on
“The State of the Nation’s Water and Power Infrastructure”
February 14, 2018

Today, the Subcommittee on Water, Power and Oceans will examine the state of our Nation’s water and power infrastructure. This comes the same week that the Trump Administration released their highly-anticipated infrastructure proposal which recognizes the need to address our broken federal permitting process and bring our nation’s infrastructure into the 21st century.

As a proud Coloradan, it was only fitting that my first hearing as chairman of this Subcommittee was focused on modernizing western water and power infrastructure. In the year that has followed, we have discharged a robust water and power agenda. Legislation such as my Bureau of Reclamation Pumped Storage Hydropower Act is just one of dozens of proposals that this Subcommittee has promoted that are aimed at bringing much needed stability and certainty to the broken federal permitting process.

Today, we will hear the story of Sites Reservoir. Originally authorized as part of the CALFED projects, the Sites project has been studied by the federal government since 2003. At one point, the federal government was considering over 50 separate locations for this reservoir

Let me put this into perspective. As I said, the Sites project has been studied by the federal government since 2003. SpaceX was founded in 2002. In 2004, the company first discussed the idea for the Falcon Heavy rocket. Last week, SpaceX successfully shot a car attached to that rocket toward the sun. We have now shot a car toward the sun in less time that it has taken to study Sites.

This is simply unacceptable and could serve as a case study for what many of our western water and power projects suffer from: paralysis by analysis.

Unfortunately, this is only one of many stories of the federal government not being able to get out of its own way. We will hear today of the seemingly endless process – sometimes more than ten years – to simply transfer title of a Bureau of Reclamation project to a local beneficiary who already operates and maintains the project. Former Vice-President Al Gore first proposed this concept in the mid-1990's. Furthermore, in a Senate Energy and Natural Resources hearing on title transfers just last month, Senator Angus King stated that – *I quote* – “[T]he problem is that NEPA is being applied simply for handing of the deed.” – *end quote*

I crafted my Bureau of Reclamation Title Transfer Act to address this very issue. Title Transfers can be a win-win: the federal estate is reduced while also incentivizing early repayment of federal investment, and the beneficiaries can leverage non-federal financing through ownership and equity in a project.

I want to recognize Secretary Zinke and thank him for recognizing the need for reform and transmitting a proposal very similar to my own to Congress just last week. I look forward to working with the Secretary to improve the process and to incentivize title transfers.

While frustration in the federal process and stories of seemingly endless environmental reviews will fill our hearing room this afternoon, we will also hear pragmatic ideas – born from those who have navigated the broken federal permitting process – that do not erode environmental protections but rather strike a balance between human and environmental needs.

Many of these ideas – as well as many of our subcommittee’s water and power proposals in the 115th Congress – are in lock-step with the Administration’s infrastructure proposal to streamline the federal permitting process. It is encouraging that we now have an Administration that recognizes the struggles that the West has faced and understands that federal permitting reform must be the first thing we address if we want to get serious about addressing our nation’s infrastructure needs.

I want to thank the Administration for putting forth these proposals and our witnesses for being with us today. I look forward to your testimonies.